

Testimony before the U.S. Congress  
Committee on International Relations  
Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia  
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R - Florida), Chairman  
Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2200  
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By  
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**“The Middle East and the United Nations”**

Madame Chairman, I welcome the opportunity to present the Administration’s agenda and priorities regarding the Middle East at the United Nations and discuss with you issues surrounding UN policies, activities, operations, programs and assistance relating to that part of the world.

I would like to highlight the following sets of issues: the Middle East Peace Process, Lebanon and Iraq. These issues reflect current Administration priorities in the Middle East, and are examples of constructive engagement with the UN in the Middle East.

**Middle East Peace Process**

Before discussing the UN’s political role as a member of the Quartet, I would like to say a brief word about peacekeeping. United Nations peacekeeping missions remain a key aspect of UN involvement in the Middle East and play an important, stabilizing role. Specifically, the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), in place since June 1974, has helped to de-escalate tension between Israel and Syria. The UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), in place since May 1948, with military observers from 23 nations, contributes to the overall stability in the region. And finally, the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), in place since March 1978, is seen as a stabilizing influence in reducing tensions between Israel, Lebanon and Syria. The U.S. contributes to all of these operations through the international peacekeeping item in the budget. The FY06 request for UNDOF is \$8 million, and the request for UNIFIL is \$18 million.

The United Nations, along with the United States, the European Union and Russia, make up the Quartet. The Quartet's vision mirrors that of President Bush, i.e., two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. The Roadmap is the way to achieve that goal; it remains the international community's blueprint, endorsed by Israel and the Palestinians, for the way forward to achieving peace. Both sides have obligations under the Roadmap. The Quartet provides the framework for constructive involvement and engagement of the international community in the peace process.

The United Nations, through the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East, also plays a key role in providing humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people. For example, the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) is a UN agency charged with providing for basic education, health, and social services to Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. The United States is the largest national donor to UNRWA. The Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration has contributed \$349 million to UNRWA since 2003. In addition, USAID has given UNRWA \$37 million in grants since 2001.

It is important to say a word about the treatment of Israel in the UN General Assembly (UNGA), the Commission of Human Rights (CHR), and other, less formal UN-related groupings.

U.S. policy has long been that Israel should have the same standing and be able to play the same role as any other member state of the United Nations. As this Committee knows all too well, however, Israel has regularly been the target of unbalanced, one-sided resolutions in the UNGA and the CHR. In addition, because of the unwillingness of other member states to allow Israel to play its legitimate role as a member of one of the UN's regional groupings, Israel has not been able to enjoy the full scope for action that its UN membership should permit.

We have made redress of this unacceptable situation a top priority of our own diplomacy at the UNGA, the CHR and elsewhere. Those efforts have borne some fruit. For example, analysis of voting on the three key anti-Israel resolutions at the UNGA over the past three years shows a trend away from Israel-bashing. But the percentage of votes in favor of these resolutions -- still close to 60 percent - shows that there is still a long way to go and underscores the need to maintain an aggressive diplomacy with each new session.

Similarly, the U.S. has continued efforts to promote full and equal Israeli participation throughout the UN system. In particular, we have supported Israel's membership in the geographically-based consultative groups that are the organizing venues for action within the system. For example, intensive U.S. efforts led to Israel's being granted in 2000 full membership in the "Western Europe and Other Group" (WEOG) in New York for a period of four years. Because Israel was unable to obtain membership in the Asia Group -- its geographic home -- during that period, Israel's WEOG membership was extended for another four years in 2004.

Unfortunately, Israel's WEOG membership applies only to New York. It does not have the same level of participation in WEOG activities elsewhere, including, for example, at the Commission on Narcotic Drugs or the UN Environmental Program. We will continue our efforts to correct these anomalies.

### Syria-Lebanon

An issue currently confronting the international community, on which there has been constructive UN engagement, is the restoration of Lebanon's sovereignty, independence and freedom. The UN Security Council and the international community signaled its strong support for these goals last September with the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1559, which calls for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon, the disbanding of militias, and the right of all Lebanese people to express their own political free will free of foreign interference.

UNSCR 1559 must be implemented fully and immediately. We have seen some progress with Syria continuing to withdraw its military forces. We will need to ensure, however, that Syria's intelligence forces also are withdrawn and that Syria no longer interferes in Lebanon's internal affairs, including Lebanon's political process. Lebanese elections must be held by the end of May, in accordance with Lebanese constitutional procedures, and elections must be free, fair and credible, monitored by international observers.

We expect the Secretary-General's report to the Security Council on the implementation of UNSCR 1559 shortly. The U.S. is working very closely with other members of the Security Council to determine next steps within the UN forum to ensure verification of the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon and to press for Syrian compliance on other aspects of UNSCR 1559.

We were confronted once again with the need for real change in the region on February 14 with the assassination of Lebanon's former Prime Minister Hariri. Shortly thereafter, the United Nations conducted a fact-finding assessment of the Lebanese government's investigation into Hariri's assassination and the Secretary-General reported its findings and recommendations on March 24, 2005. The U.S. strongly supported the Secretary-General's recommendation that an independent international commission be entrusted with conducting an investigation. The United States also co-sponsored UNSCR 1595, which established said commission. The UN's fruitful efforts in Lebanon are a testament to its potential for balanced influence in the region.

## Iraq

Democracy also is our priority for Iraq. The January 30 elections opened a new chapter in Iraqi history. These elections were an essential step in the Iraqi people's path towards stability and democratic self-governance. Now begins the process of drafting and ratifying a constitution that will be the basis of a fully democratic Iraq.

The United Nations has played an important role thus far in Iraq's political transition process, particularly in the formation of the Iraqi Interim Government, and then with the important assistance provided to the Independent Electoral Commission for Iraq. Under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1546, the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, as requested by the Government of Iraq, shall play a leading role to "promote national dialogue and consensus-building on the drafting of a national constitution by the people of Iraq." The UN has said it would play such a role and help coordinate other international technical assistance. We urge the UN to prepare in advance to do so, given its broad expertise and experience with constitutional assistance.

In addition to constitutional and electoral assistance (for the October referendum and December elections), the UN also has a mandate to provide humanitarian and reconstruction assistance. In the past months, the UN has deployed personnel to Baghdad to work with the Iraqis and the international community in coordinating such assistance. In addition, the UN has deployed Liaison Detachment Teams, essentially advance teams, to Basra and Erbil where they are working toward the future deployment of additional, substantive staff. We urge the UN to expand implementation of its humanitarian and economic reconstruction activities, and a robust presence in Basra and Erbil would serve that

purpose. In addition, we expect offices in Basra and Erbil will be necessary to support the Iraqis in the next phase of the political transition.

In conclusion, Madame Chairman, let me thank you again for this opportunity to engage on variety of issues relating to the Middle East and the United Nations. As you are aware, these are difficult issues and much remains to be done. We must continue to take a strong stand and to press for action within the UN system. I welcome your comments and questions.

## **U.S. contributions involving Middle East programs and activities:**

UNRWA's 2005 regular cash budget is \$339 million; its 2005 emergency appeal for West Bank and Gaza is \$186 million.

### **USG Voluntary Contributions to UNRWA**

Fiscal Year	Regular Budget	Emergency Appeal
2003	\$88 million	\$46 million
2004	\$87.4 million	\$40 million
2005	\$88 million	

- The UN regular budget for the UN's Regional Economic Commission's Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) for the 2004-2005 biennium is \$50.9 million (roughly a U.S. contribution of \$11.20 million given that the U.S. contributes 22% of the UN's regular budget).
- The UN regular budget for the International Court of Justice for 2004-2005 is \$34.9 million (roughly a U.S. contribution of \$7.68 million given that the U.S. contributes 22% of the UN's regular budget).
- The UN regular budget for UNTSO (UN Truce Supervision Organization) for the 2004-2005 biennium is approximately \$56 million (roughly a U.S. contribution of \$12.32 million given that the U.S. contributes 22% of the UN's regular budget).
- The UN regular budget for UNAMI (UN Assistance Mission in Iraq) for 2005 is \$145 million (roughly a U.S. contribution of \$ 31.9 million given that the U.S. contributes 22% of the UN's regular budget). In 2004 it was nearly \$35 million (roughly a U.S. contribution of \$7.7 million given that the U.S. contributes 22% of the UN's regular budget).

## Contributions for International Peacekeeping Activities

*(\$ in thousands)*

Account	FY05 Supplemental	FY05 Enacted	FY05 Total	FY06 Request
UNDOF (Golan Heights)	3,897	5,740	9,637	8,020
UNIFIL (Lebanon)	11,831	1,719	13,550	18,042
MINURSO (Western Sahara)	4,156	5,848	10,004	8,325

The supplemental FY 2005 funding has not (as of 4/18/2005) been passed by Congress. Actual spending in FY 2004 was UNDOF (\$10.810 mil), UNIFIL (\$10.460 mil.), and MINURSO (\$10.043 mil.)